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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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Inquiring Words

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

— Julian of Norwich

A dozen tips for growing congregations

Jim Corrigan recently travelled around the country for *The Inquirer* reporting on successful Unitarian congregations. Here he highlights 12 lessons he learned about making growth a reality.

- 1) Be intentional about growth. This does not mean caring only about numerical growth, but rather that the congregation and its leadership should develop a 'growth-oriented strategy' to ensure that all their activities are able to contribute to growth.
- 2) Provide a warm welcome. Make sure everyone, and particularly newcomers, feels welcome when they arrive (and during the event) – for services and all your activities.
- 3) Maintain a busy and varied programme. Cater for different interests in the congregation and include events that will attract people from outside. Sometimes these may be aimed specifically at the wider community, like a community arts programme or community choir, in which case a big publicity drive is likely to be needed.
- 4) Produce good publicity materials. This may sound easy, but it's not. All publicity (including posters, leaflets and cards) should be attractive, written in a clear style and suited to purpose. Is this leaflet for a single event or for the longer-term? Does it fulfil its role?
- 5) Advertise your presence. Make yourself known in your area by gaining publicity in the local media (in as many ways as you can) and by advertising events. An attractive website is vital too – as are striking notice boards. Keep looking for new ways to get your group known.
- 6) Reach out into your community. An outward-looking congregation that engages with the society around it is much more likely to grow.
- 7) Covenants build trust. Congregational covenants create a sense of purpose – and they promote trust between minister and congregation.
- 8) Be open to change and be willing to take risks. You need to be ready to experiment with your events and programmes.
- 9) Evaluate your successes and failures. A congregation and a leadership which does not learn, adapt and change will not survive.
- 10) Organise inspiring worship and other spiritual activities. This is central to our congregational life; members and newcomers alike need to feel spiritually uplifted if they are to commit themselves.
- 11) Take care of your buildings. Attractive, well-cared for buildings say a great deal about a congregation. Find out how you can access funds for upkeep.
- 12) Good management structures are vital. A leadership which manages congregational life effectively, while remaining open and accountable, will create trust and empower members to achieve.

Correction

The Rev Peter Roberts wrote to point out that in his article, 'Don't blame Darwin for the religion vs. science argument' (*Inquirer*, 7 March), the Rev Cliff Reed 'does a great disservice to William Paley, an exponent of Natural Theology in mistaking him for the notorious Archbishop James Ussher.'

Cliff Reed replies: Mea culpa! Peter Roberts is quite right, it was a careless error on my part! It was indeed James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who worked out, in the 1650s, that the world had been created in 4004 BC (sometime in October, I think). William Paley does come into the story though. Darwin had read this distinguished Anglican cleric's 'Natural Theology' (1802) which put forward the argument now known as 'Intelligent Design'. The world is a happy place, said Paley, with everything created just as it is now to fit exactly into its place in the cosmos. So obviously designed was the world that it must have a Designer – so proving the existence of God. The young Darwin is said to have been impressed with Paley's delightful picture of a happy, unchanging and apparently rational Creation. It was, of course, a picture that he later found wanting!

Bristol switches on the 'Lights'

The Bright Lights group in Bristol offers fellowship, fun and baby cuddles. **Lindy Latham** tells how to set up an intergenerational group.

Once upon a time, just over two years ago, a young family arrived at our Frenchay chapel having spotted an article about Unitarians in a local alternative magazine. Although they liked our theology and approach to spirituality, they found that the chapel service was not an ideal for younger people. Also, we did not have the facilities or people power to create a Sunday school. However, with a bit of creative thinking and much help from members of both Unitarian Meeting Bristol and Frenchay, we decided to create a new group which would meet monthly, with the focus being on a way of developing relationships between the generations: having fun together, listening to each other with love and respect, caring for the world and deepening our connection with the divine/mystery. Almost unintentionally, we developed around the principles of engagement groups – small group ministry.

Who are we?

'Bright Lights' is an intergenerational group who meet monthly at Unitarian Meeting, Bristol for fun and fellowship, whilst aiming to create community across the generations. 'We', the facilitators, are a group of six adults from both our Bristol meeting places who have agreed to support this new venture and to share in the facilitation, meeting as a group for forward planning. 'We' are also a group of very busy people, with many other commitments, which is why working as a team has been so important.

Why do we do it?

'Why?' is perhaps the most important question. Although the initial motivation was to create a spiritually appropriate space and time for younger people, it soon became obvious that there was a need to find a way to welcome all ages together, including non-church going adults. Society today can be so focused on separating the age groups, doing things *for* the young, *for* the old, rather than *with*... Many of our church members live apart from their families and so, by creating an all-age gathering, a whole new community for caring and sharing has developed. One of our members works with children who have special needs and, when they come along to 'Bright Lights,' these children particularly appreciate the time when they are accepted for who they are in a creative way.

What exactly do we do?

Visitors are greeted as they arrive at the chapel for 'Bright Lights', and are invited to make a name tag for themselves. We always set out a circle of chairs beforehand, with a table at the centre for a chalice, and a money box for contributions towards the cost of running the sessions. At the opening time we sing 'Come, Come Whoever You Are'. We then remind ourselves of the covenant – a set of promises about how we want to be together – which we have created as a group. The facilitator then introduces the session and leads us into a circle of welcome, where we briefly introduce ourselves and share any news, so everyone's voice can be heard. The programme then unfolds, usually with several creative options on offer, which are linked with an overarching theme. This leads into a time of refreshments: food is an important feature of the group and is often one of our activities (e.g. making pancakes together). Building in a time for everyone to end the session together is



Sally Pugh (l-r) Caitlin McAdam, Josie Vallis and Delydd McAdam enjoy a 'Bright Lights' session. Photo by Lindy Latham

What participants say

"I like the varied activities and companionship." *Grace Cooper – aged 82 (Frenchay member).*

"I like making things, especially felt." *Caitlin McAdam – aged 6.*

"Relationships between younger and older are so important in today's society, especially when grandparents live so far away" – *Delydd McAdam (Bright Lights co-facilitator).*

"'Bright Lights' is a space to be creative and playful and to connect with each other and ourselves in both a deeper and playful level." *Clare Beccles (Bright Lights co-facilitator).*

"We know we are missing something – everyone told us how great it is – see you there soon!" *Susan and Peter Wildman (UMB members).*

"I enjoy the opportunity for creativity and enjoying the communion of all ages." *Yvonne Arburrow (Frenchay member).*

"Very enjoyable and enlightening." *Marie Eastman (Frenchay member).*

"I like Bright Lights. It is friendly, and we get to talk and chat over a cuppa." *Jane Hullin (UMB member).*

"I like the mixed ages – there is no division between adults and children." *Olga Jennings (UMB Member).*

"Friendship and fellowship, the informal relaxed atmosphere, and cuddling the babies – that is great!" *Sally Pugh (Bright Lights co-facilitator).*

vital. Knowing that many people have other responsibilities to return to, we hold our closing circle at least 15 minutes before the time when the session is scheduled to end. This circle includes sharing and showing our practical achievements as well as what we enjoyed most about the afternoon. Finally, we sing 'Go Now in Peace' to bring the group to a close. Since 'Bright Lights' started, our facilitators have not only used their own creative ideas for group activities, but have also made use of the very rich resources available from the General Assembly (e.g. the Chalice Award Scheme). We have enjoyed the support of our national youth leader, John Harley, who has led a couple of sessions for us. We have also invited folk with specialist skills, such as Circomedia, a local circus group, to both entertain and teach, and we hope that some local musicians will be coming to visit us in the near future. We have discovered that it is important to be prepared for the unexpected: sometimes activities finish sooner than planned

(Continued on page 5)

New hymn book gets thumbs up

The new hymn book 'Sing Your Faith' will be launched at the Annual Meetings in Chester. **Ant Howe** managed to get his hands on an advance copy.

The publication of *Sing Your Faith* has been long awaited by Unitarians. The waiting is now almost over! Various 'hymn sings' around the UK where Unitarians got to try out some of the hymns (and the hymn book editors got to try them out on us!) have whetted appetites and there is a mood of excitement about the new hymn book.

I am honoured to be asked to provide this review and it has been a delight to spend many hours with the new hymn book over the last couple of weeks.

First impressions? There is something for everyone in this collection whatever your particular theological bias happens to be. Our new hymn book reflects perfectly the great spectrum of belief (and doubt!) which makes up Unitarianism today.

As the preface states, the books currently in use will continue to serve our movement and this new hymn book is not designed to be a replacement. Indeed, a congregation using this book alone would soon lament the loss of most of our well-loved hymns. Used as a supplement, however, this new collection opens our congregations to a wealth of new material which can only enhance our worship.

So let's dive in. What's the first thing to notice?

Alphabetical! At last a Unitarian hymn book that is alphabetical! For me this is a huge step forward! All you need to do is remember the first line of a hymn and you can turn straight to it. The strange hymn 'titles' which were a quirk of the green book have now gone, and every hymn is titled by its first line. No more searching around through indexes (unless you want to). And to continue alphabetically....

It's **big!** 231 songs, hymns, and chants.

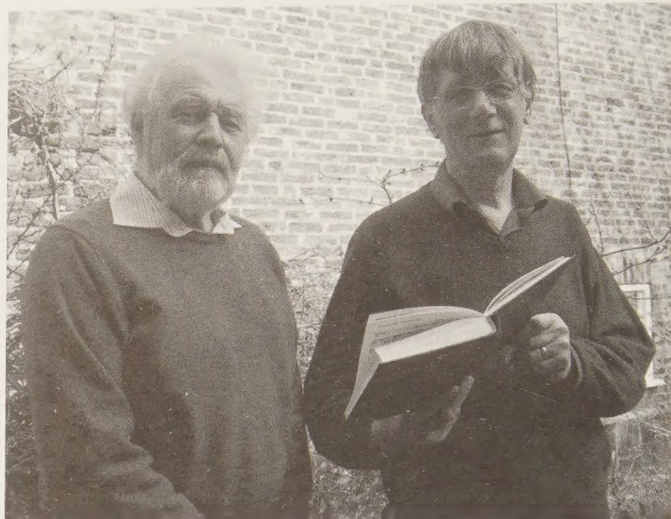
Christian: This was my first surprise. There is so much in this new book that honours our liberal Christian tradition. The surprise, for me, is how deeply some of the hymns go into the Christian tradition. There are certainly some hymns that might not have been sung in Unitarian congregations just a few years ago. 'Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you' (15) is an example of this.

There are also a number of hymns that are suitable (if not written for) Communion Services: 'Bread and wine are of the earth. God's good food by us refined ... Jesus said 'remember me' ... (12). Sung Eucharist anyone?

I don't think any Unitarian who identifies as Christian can be disappointed with our new hymn book or will feel that their beliefs are not given full expression within many of the hymns.

David Dawson: You'll find a lot of new David Dawson tunes in the book. I'm certainly not saying that this is a bad thing. David has written some truly beautiful tunes. Many are beautiful in their simplicity such as *Middleton* (30) whereas others might challenge the smaller congregation and the organist who is used to playing only standard hymns. *Name Unnamed* (104) is an example of this – a beautiful tune, but watch the timing when you learn it!

Earth & Nature: Those who find religious inspiration



Editors of 'Sing your Faith', David Dawson (left) and the Rev Andrew Hill worked hard to get the hymn book out in time for the GA. Photo by Kate Taylor

through nature will not be disappointed. There is some truly wondrous imagery used, complemented by sensitive tune. Try *Spirit of Earth* (147) for starters.

Finding old favourites from the Pink Book: *Spirit of Life*, *Flying Free*, *Weaver God Creator* and others are all there. Watch out for new tunes for some of the hymns which have made it over from the pink book (*Let us Sing*) though.

God! It seems strange that in a hymn book designed for use in a religious movement that I would be surprised by how much the G-word is used, but I am! Although there are a number of hymns which will be appreciated by the religious humanists among us, it is very noticeable that theist Unitarians will be particularly well served. The imagery used is vast. Just look at 'God of every stone and pebble' (50) and *Bring many names* (14).

High notes reduced! Many familiar tunes have been brought down half a tone or even a tone. Many of us will appreciate this. No more screeching for the very high notes!

Index: There is an index of tunes, first lines, metrical index, and subject index. The subject index is well laid out and extremely comprehensive – no matter what the subject for the service that day, you'll find a subject heading in the index to fit. However, I was a little surprised to note that there are 15 hymns on the subject of Wind and only one on the subject of ministry.

Joyful! There are plenty of hymns included that have a joyful and celebrative feel and, at last, we are able to sing Unitarian-written words to the tune *Diademata* (201).

Key point made: The preface states "The open and non-creedal nature of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches makes a hymn book significant for visitors and inquirers seeking insights into Unitarian and Free Christian thought and practice." If this is the case then I think we owe the editors a great debt of gratitude. The visitor or inquirer could not help but get a sense of how lovingly inclusive Unitarianism can be by glancing through this book.

Legacy: Because our new hymn book contains nothing that is in either the red or green books, the vast majority of material will be new to most Unitarians. This means that this book
(Continued on next page)

Purple book covers belief *and* doubt

(Continued from previous page)

can be in use for years to come without feeling 'tired'. This new publication is an amazing achievement and will be a real lasting legacy.

Multiple hymn books in one service: This is a slight drawback. If a person conducting worship wanted to mix new and old, it would mean a congregation juggling hymn books. It's not an insurmountable problem, but one that those leading worship need to be aware of.

Novelty? It would be a shame if copies of this hymn book were left gathering dust at the back of our churches. It needs to be used! That will mean doing the work of learning some new tunes. Don't worry, there are a number of familiar tunes (see below) but it would be a tragedy if some of these new tunes weren't learnt by our people.

Organists: The book sits nicely on the music stand and will open out flat with just a little encouragement. The music is well laid out, clear and easy to read, and there shouldn't be too much that is beyond the scope of musicians who are accustomed to playing from the green book.

Purple: In case you didn't know, our new hymn book is this colour!

Quickly useable.: There are plenty of new words to familiar tunes so congregations will be able use it straight away before learning any of the new tunes. *Amazing Grace, Finlandia, Little Cornard, Regent Square, St Fulbert* are all in there.

Risky? Why would a denomination which is in numerical decline need a new hymn book? (you might ask). Having seen the new book, I'm convinced we *need* it. We need to invest in our future; this book is a great way of declaring we expect to thrive in the 21st century and that our movement is evolving and developing.

Small congregations: It can't be denied that many of our congregations are small. However, there is something *every* congregation can sing in this book and plenty that even the

smallest congregation can learn if they will take the risk.

Which brings me to:

Try new things! Towards the end of the book you'll find a number of chants which can be sung as they are written or as rounds. Even the most timid of singers could get to grips with these.

Unitarian: It's a thoroughly Unitarian publication. You'll find a number of hymns mentioning the flaming chalice such as *We light the flame* (194). Many contemporary Unitarians have contributed words for the hymns and you'll find the work of June Bell, David Doel, Cliff Reed, David Usher, Peter Sampson and many others in our new hymn book.

Value for money? At £10 a copy it will be a significant investment for many of our congregations. Is it money well spent? If all a congregation does is sing a few new words to the old familiar tunes then it's probably not worth getting. Unitarians will need to engage with this book and make it their own. When considering how many years of work has gone into the editing and production £10 does not seem so expensive.

Worth the wait? Yes! Without a doubt!

eXtra bits: There are some resources for worship at the back of the book. If you were expecting anything like the scale of words for worship contained in *Singing the Living Tradition* then you are likely to be a little disappointed. There isn't a great deal there, but it would certainly be enough to get through a service if the preacher doesn't turn up!

Yes! It's a resounding 'yes' overall from me! I urge you to order if you've not already done so. Don't just leave it to your local church. Buy a copy for yourself and begin to familiarise yourself with this wonderful new book.

Zeal! May this new hymn book give us renewed zeal as we Sing our Faith!

The Rev Ant Howe is minister at Kingswood and Warwick

How to switch on the 'Bright Lights'

(Continued from page 3)

for, sometimes we try to do too much in the time. Sometimes many young people with a lot of energy arrive and need a way to express it positively! So flexibility and forward planning is the key for a good session. As one of the facilitators of the group, one of my initial concerns was 'what if no children turn up?' I soon realised that our group was there for anyone, of any age, who needed communion and companionship, as you will see from the quotes on page 3.

Kindle your own 'Lights'

In Bristol we are fortunate in having a large open space with good kitchen facilities, and also a strong team of volunteers to support 'Bright Lights'. However, the model we have created is very flexible, so wherever you are and whatever your needs it can be adapted to suit your own circumstances.



Abbie Yeandle reads to Eric Holburn at a gathering of the 'Bright Lights' group in Bristol. Photo by Lindy Latham For more information about 'Bright Lights' write to brightlights@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk or contact the Rev Lindy Latham.

We hope to inspire fellow Unitarians to develop similar intergenerational engagement groups over the next few years, to meet the needs of a wider range of people, and reach out into our local communities. The Engagement Support Panel (part of the General Assembly's Education and Training Commission) has produced an introductory leaflet about the 'Bright Lights' model which will be launched at this year's annual meetings in Chester. If you are interested in setting up an intergenerational engagement group in your own community then please contact the Engagement Support Panel for further information on useful resources and facilitator training.

The Rev Lindy Latham is minister with Bristol Frenchay and Bristol Brunswick.

Steve Dick: In memory of times past

By Kate Taylor

It is always sad when someone who is honourable and dedicated takes up a position where he does not, or perhaps cannot, succeed. Expectations are frustrated, priorities jeopardized, and relationships fractured. One thinks of many a football manager.

The Rev Steve Dick is an almost larger-than-life figure in our Movement and has in the past 'done the state some service'. Whilst recognising that the role of Chief Executive of the General Assembly has proved to be the wrong one for him, it would be churlish not to make some reference to the ten years Steve spent from 1996 to 2007 as the Minister/Secretary (commonly known as the District Minister), of the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly (LDPA).

The Rev James McClelland explains that the job combined two functions, both to be the LDPA's public face to the 32 constituent congregations, and to be the Secretary of an incorporated body, requiring considerable legal and financial responsibility. Jim adds, 'In both roles, Steve was first and foremost a minister and, as such, was open to all who turned to him for advice and support, be it congregations seeking help when it came to ministerial settlements or ministers experiencing difficulties in their work. He made time for people and gave them of his best. The job itself was heavily administrative. It suited him. His home, a large house, was also his office and as such was filled with computer equipment which he used to good effect. He himself produced the District newsletter which he renamed *The Lantern*. As he found computer skills helpful in his work, he encouraged congregations to develop their own computer skills and use them to the same good effect.'

'But the job was not all about administration and meeting dead-lines. Steve made a point of visiting congregations, sometimes to conduct a service – he is an able preacher – or attend an AGM or committee meeting. At such times, he was both an enabler and a resource of information that could be



The Rev Steve Dick departed as Chief Executive of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in March.

Executive Committee Statement

As we previously indicated in the agreed statement announcing that Steve Dick would be leaving the post of Chief Executive, the Executive Committee met (in March) and has considered the interim arrangements and timetable for recruiting a new Chief Executive.

We are very grateful for the efforts being made by staff (members) who are maintaining our administration effectively – particularly at this very busy time of preparation for the Annual Meetings in Chester. Although they are coping remarkably well, we do hope that everybody will, if necessary, be patient.

Before recruiting a new Chief Executive, the Executive Committee now intends to take a little time to review the support and administrative needs of the denomination. We have asked an external consultant to help us with this part of the process. We then intend to appoint an interim manager following the Annual Meetings and expect to begin recruiting a new Chief Executive very soon after.

– Contributed by Peter Soulsby, convenor of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.

drawn upon to help projects be carried forward'

Golders Green minister, the Rev Feargus O'Connor emphasises Steve's practical assistance to congregations especially with regard to the role of trustees and sources of funding. 'I think everyone would agree,' Feargus says, 'that his knowledge of charity law and the role of trustees is second to none within our Unitarian communities'.

As someone new to the Movement who has since served as the minister at Hull Unitarian Church for the last four years, the Rev Tom McCready comments on the encouragement he received from Steve in the LDPA days. 'I first met Steve Dick in London over 10 years ago, early in my involvement with Unitarianism, Tom says, 'and it was, if I remember correctly, at either an LPDA meeting or a London Lay Preachers meeting that I first spoke to him. The second time I spoke to him was at an induction service where he delivered a reading that I thought was very impressive. I managed to get his attention for a moment and told him so and asked him where the reading came from. A couple of days later a copy of the reading arrived through the post with a friendly note from Steve. I felt then that it said a lot about the integrity of the man that, with all the calls upon his time and all the people he had to deal with, he had the time to pass on a word of care and encouragement to a beginner like myself.'

Steve was a member of the board of both the old Inquirer Publishing Company and its successor, The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004) and was the chairman of the directors from 2005 to 2007. As the company secretary, I enjoyed working with him.

Kate Taylor is a member of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield.

Communication, communication, communication

As the first turnover of members of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches approaches, **Peter Soulsby**, convenor, answered some questions about how things are going and about what the future holds.

The new General Assembly structure has been in place for three years now, how do you think it is working?

I think it is working remarkably well but, of course, the election of some new Executive Committee members will give us all an excellent opportunity to look critically at what is not yet right as well as to build on success. Four years ago, the denomination deliberately decided against electing or appointing a single person as our 'Leader'. The overwhelming preference was for a collective leadership – an Executive Committee. I know some people still wonder whether that was the right choice, but it was a very clear decision that the denomination took. The 'collaborative approach' adopted by the Executive Committee has, in practice, been a great success. Collaboration and co-operation – building on the strengths of many and sharing responsibilities – rather than following the charismatic vision of one single individual – is very much in keeping with our Unitarian ethos.

In what specific ways are the process and the results different from how the GA previously worked?

The most important change in process has been the clear responsibility given to the Executive Committee to offer strategic leadership. The General Assembly Council that met for a few hours 4 times a year had strengths – particularly the links with our District Associations – but it could never hope to get to grips with the complex issues that face us and that have required a lot of thought, frank discussion – and time!

What do you see as the biggest accomplishments of the EC?

There's a lot to choose from. First, I would stress the successful work of preparing the ground for growth and renewal. Second, I would pick out developing – though not yet quite completing – priorities and action plans across the wide range of the denomination's activities and interests. Finally I would pick out the focus on 'future ministry' and valuing and supporting our Ministers who are so important to us all.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the EC and the movement?

Personally I'd say there are three challenges – communication, communication and communication. We need to be noticed by the outside world if we are to grow.

I am also keen for us to build on the excellent dialogue that the Executive Committee has developed through the 'Road Shows' around the country and with members attending district

association meetings. I know it has required considerable time and commitment from Executive Committee members but it has been very valuable for communication in both directions. Nothing beats face to face dialogue!

What are your priorities for this next term in the EC?

That will be for the Executive Committee – now with 4 new members – to answer. Personally, I think we need to take a fresh look at how we work and relate to our staff, our 'activists' and our volunteers. We need to be better joined up. An important part of this is taking the opportunity we now have to re-examine the role of the person who heads up our staff.

When are the EC meetings for the coming year?

The complete pattern of meetings is not yet fixed, but we've already got 8th/9th May 17th/18th July and 4th/5th September in our diaries. It's already looking as if we will have very full agendas. There is a lot to be done.

If you had a magic wand, is there anything about the structure you would change?

The structure is something that the General Assembly has chosen and fixed. It's for us all to make it work.

I know there will be other opportunities to say this – but I'd like to finish by thanking all the Executive Committee members over these exciting first three years. I've served on an awful lot of committees in local and national bodies over the years – without exception the GA Executive Committee is the most dedicated and inspiring group of people I have ever worked with. Acting as the Convenor and being part of the 'collaborative leadership' of a community that means so much to us all has been an honour and a pleasure.

I have no doubt that the new and continuing members of the Executive Committee will have many challenges ahead – but I know we have some real success to build on.

Sir Peter Soulsby MP is member of Leicester Unitarians.

Global Chalice Lighting

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 68th in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. Each congregation is asked to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the 'Global Chalice Lighting' and naming the group which submitted it.

This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during April.

We light this chalice to honour those before us

**Whose courage to challenge dogma
Has made our path easier.**

**We ask that the light from this flame
Inspires us all to make our journey
Towards truth, love, beauty and justice.**

**We pray that the warmth from this flame
Reaches those who feel threatened
By living their heretical beliefs.**

Derek McCullough

Australian and New Zealand Unitarian

Universalist Association

www.anzua.org/anzua_alt

Faith and Public Issues Commis

The commission's mission statement is as follows: *"We seek to offer the distinctive Unitarian and Free Christian perspectives on matters relating to the arenas of ecumenical, inter-faith and social action engagement, and in turn, inform and stimulate thought and action on these same subjects within the General Assembly."*

Jeff Gould: It has been my privilege to chair the meetings of the Faith and Public Issues Commission of the General Assembly since it began its work in July 2007. The work of the commission is largely directed towards maintaining effective relationships with non-Unitarian bodies. This special feature has been compiled so that members of our constituent congregations and affiliated societies will be aware of what the commission's members are doing on their behalf. We would always welcome suggestions from Unitarians and Free Christians as to what additional activities we might nurture and support.

The commission has produced a banner for general use by all GA congregations, district associations and affiliated societies for public demonstrations, events and worship. It reads: *"Unitarians Celebrate the Diversity of Creation!"* It also contains the GA website address. This is now available for use through Essex Hall.

I enjoy working with the other members of the commission, each of whom brings a host of experiences in and knowledge of the three spheres of our shared remit: social responsibility; inter-faith activities; and ecumenical concerns. It is the last subject that features in my own pastoral life, as I am a self-confessed "ecumaniac." In order for the General Assembly to engage in the wider conversation that is taking place amongst the churches of the nation, it is important that there be committed representation on ecumenical bodies and attendance at events that cut across denominational barriers. My own background is a great help to me in that effort, as I served on the staff of an Anglican theological college in Berkeley, California, worked as a hospital and prison chaplain in San Francisco, and have been involved in local ecumenical bodies throughout the course of my twenty years of professional ministry in the United Kingdom. At present, I am the minister of the Unitarian congregations in Bury and Ainsworth, Lancashire. In the communities that I serve I am pleased to be involved in the local branch of Churches Together in England, and participate in regional events that draw from many different expressions of Christian faith. The inter-faith component of the commission is borne out in my own membership of the committee of the Manchester Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews.

Chris Goacher: I am currently the Secretary of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, where we work to keep the issue of peace high on the Unitarian agenda and ensure that Unitarian views are expressed in peace circles. I currently serve as the East Midland Unitarians Partnership Minister, which can make attending meetings difficult, as most meetings between peace organisations take place in London. I believe there is a strong need for us to express our faith in action, and as a congregation at Derby, we express our social responsibility by sponsoring a child in India and 10% of the medicines used at St Mary's dispensary in Tanzania.

My other interests are to do with inter-faith dialogue, and I represent the Unitarian faith on both local and regional inter-faith bodies

in the East Midlands, and as part of the Faith Advisors team at the University of Derby. My interests are reflected in the diverse activities of my congregations, which include meditation in both the Christian and Buddhist traditions, and celebrations of the solstices, etc., and where we regularly have speakers from different faith perspectives at our services.

Karen Hanely: As a member of Faith and Public Issues Commission my main interest is in inter-faith and inter-denominational dialogue; fair trade and trade justice. I see everyone as equal in their exploration on their spiritual journeys; and would like to see the ending of unfair prices paid to producers of goods and services.

In March 2009 I will be attending the National Poverty Consultation on Faith Communities: Empowering Communities. I am one of the Unitarian delegates of RADAR, which is an informal group among officers of the national churches and relevant agencies that exchanges views and information in order to co-ordinate their church's public policy work which directly impinges on the Westminster Parliament. It has been meeting on a monthly basis since 2002. Last year I was also warmly welcomed at every workshop and service at Engaging Spirituality at the Gathering at Swanwick; organised by Churches Together in England (CTE). The AGM for the Trade Justice Movement, of which the General Assembly is a member, was very interesting, coming at a time when every economic policy was under review last autumn, and many ideas previously put forward by the Trade Justice Movement had suddenly become mainstream proposals for governments.

Alan Kennedy: As a former member of the GA Ecumenical Relations Panel, I was more than happy to continue serving the denomination on the new Faith and Public Issues Commission. I also represent the GA on the Churches Together in England Group for Local Unity, when work commitments permit. My last ministry was in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where I was fully involved in the ecumenical and inter-faith scenes. Since returning to Liverpool, I have been in secular employment, working with asylum seekers. I am still involved in local ecumenism, and both conduct worship and play the organ at a number of Unitarian congregations, as well as for other denominations in the city and the Northwest of England.

Gavin Lloyd: I am a member of the Oxford congregation, worshipping at Harris Manchester College, and am the current Immediate Past Present of the Midland Union. I was originally asked to join the former Ecumenical Panel, which was incorporated into the new Faith and Public Issues Commission. I have to confess that ecumenism remains my chief interest within this commission—an interest which I have to say is lamentably served by our cause. This for me is a matter of great regret, as Unitarianism by its nature is, or should be, ecumenically-minded, and could serve as an ideal bridge between Trinitarian Christianity and other world faiths. This isolation does us no good; the majority Trinitarian traditions can simply proceed as if we did not exist. True, there are a number of individual Unitarians who do sterling ecumenical work on the ground, yet we hear so little about them. My purpose is to raise our profile within the so-called 'mainstream.'

To that end, I have succeeded (after some persistence) in gaining admission to Churches Together in Central Oxford (CTCO) as an

on – Working in Many Spheres

server. I am now treated like an ordinary member, and help out with the minutes and the washing-up. A meeting of CTCO has been taken place at Harris Manchester College, the 'lair of the infidel'! I helped out with the yearly service for Christian Unity Week in January. I regularly attend meetings of the Theology Group of Churches Together in England and Wales, although I am clearly not of my depth, and would welcome heavyweight support. I attended the AGM of Christian Aid on 27 November 2008, and have deputized for other members of the commission at inter-faith gatherings, such as the Christian-Muslim Forum. I attend Evensong at Anglican churches in my area whenever I can, and play a full part in an Anglican prayer group in the village. Over the years I have written heretical articles in the Anglican Parish Magazine. On the face of it, these activities may seem of limited value, but I hope that at least they scratch the surface of our dreadful isolation, and enable people at least to ask Cliff Reed's question, 'Unitarianism. What's that?'

Margus O'Connor: I am minister to Golders Green Unitarians, a congregation that has long been noted for its active work for humanitarian and charitable causes. Having previously been on our General Assembly Social Responsibility and Inter-faith Panels, I feel honoured to serve on our Faith and Public Issues Commission—an outward looking commission that deals with so many important moral and inter-religious concerns. With the denomination's help, we can together advance our assembly's social responsibility, internationalist, peace, ecumenical and inter-faith witness. As Honorary Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths and member of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, the United Nations Association, Amnesty and several animal welfare organisations, I try to contribute when I can to the commission in these important areas of concern, as well as the spheres of environmental protection and justice for the developing nations of the world.

Jonny Rees: My special interest and concern in the work of the Faith and Public Issues Commission is with social responsibility work. I was a member (and later Chair) of the Social Responsibility Committee/Panel, until it was subsumed into the current commission structure, and I carried out on its behalf the survey of congregational social action, the report on which was available at last year's Annual Meetings in Hatfield. I currently sit on the denomination's ever-active Penal Affairs Panel, and one of my tasks is to act as a conduit or bridge between the panel and the commission. Prior to my retirement some five years ago, I was a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Southampton, and have written books and academic articles on citizenship, social security, housing and related areas. I have also been active in voluntary organisations, both locally and nationally, most notably the Citizens Advice Bureau. I have been a member of several statutory bodies, such as the (now disbanded) Wessex Regional Health Authority, for fourteen years. As far as denominational affairs are concerned, I chair the Edmund Kell Church in Southampton, and am Secretary of the Southern Unitarian Association.

Iwyn Thomas: I am minister of the congregations in Llandysul, Brengwyn, Pontsian, Talgarreg, Cwmsychpant and Cwrtnewydd, Wales. I represent the Welsh Unitarian Churches in the national ecumenical instrument for Wales, CYTUN, and I am involved in local and regional inter-faith activities.

Bob Wightman: I am currently minister of the Williamson Memorial Unitarian Church in Dundee, Scotland, and am heavily involved in a weekly broadcasting programme, 'This is the Day' on Radio Tay. This is an ecumenical programme, and is especially structured for people of all faiths. Within the Scottish Unitarian Association I have several colleagues throughout Scotland who attend inter-faith meetings, Christian Aid, ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland), and NEWS (Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland). I have served as the liaison between the Executive Committee and the Faith and Public Issues Commission, and will continue to be a full member of the commission in my own right, now that I am to become the President of the General Assembly.

* * *

The commission is supported in its work by many members of the General Assembly through their representation on various organisations. The following persons report to the commission on their attendance at relevant meetings:

Jean McNeile: I am the minister for Nazareth Unitarian Chapel in Padiham, a small town just outside Burnley in Lancashire. Prior to becoming a minister, I lived in Bolton, and enjoyed being part of a very good ecumenical and inter-faith community for eleven years, the latter part of which I was in training for the Unitarian ministry. I trained within the Partnership at Luther King House, Manchester, as well as at Unitarian College. I found it very beneficial to be trained side by side with five other denominations, and believed that my future ministry would be enhanced by such an experience. It is unfortunate that the town of Padiham has a very poor history of ecumenical work, and the Unitarian Chapel is very much dismissed by the other clergy in the town, and this has caused, and continues to cause, distress for my congregation and for people from other congregations who disapprove of the bias held against Unitarians. The other clergy have now stopped the annual Women's World Day of Prayer, after twenty-five years of ecumenical worship, and try to prevent a Unitarian presence at civic parades and other activities.

A balance to this difficult experience is my membership of the National Churches Together Spirituality Group. We meet about four times a year, and have very positive meetings. I have been invited to speak on Radio Lancashire, and have been able to express my Unitarianism, which was well-received, as evidenced by the large number of text messages that were received while the programme was on air. I also try to work with 'Building Bridges Burnley,' an inter-faith group for which I have offered my chapel premises for meetings for women. We intend to have another 'women only' workshop, using the theme of food to link with our respective cultures and faiths.

David Warhurst represents the General Assembly on Liberty, and **Ann Peart** represents the General Assembly on the Ecumenical Strategy Group for Ministerial Training.

The Penal Affairs Panel conducts its valuable work under the aegis of the Faith and Public Issues Commission. Its mission and membership were recently reported on in a previous issue of *THE INQUIRER*.

The commission is continuing to work in tandem with the Denominational Support Commission in promoting a more welcoming atmosphere within each congregation, through its Hospitality programme.

Phoenix of Kong Barr's dream rises

Timely donations from the Women's League and from the General Assembly helped complete the Annie Margaret Barr Kharang Orphanage. **John Hewerdine** writes of reviving the dream and providing a home for children.

When the Rev Annie Margaret Barr died in 1973, the Kharang orphanage (which was her home and her Indian dream) died with her. Children were re-located elsewhere with well-wishers and supporters of Margaret's cause. During the intervening years, many graduates of the school and orphanage have become successful, particularly in the teaching profession. Margaret would have been extremely proud of the subsequent accomplishments of her extended family.

For much of her life Kong Barr, or "Granny" as she is still remembered as by her Khasi family, had opened her doors to children of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya in North East India, just north of the border with Bangladesh.

Now, an initiative by our Unitarian Universalist friends in America is in the process of revealing a Phoenix in the ashes. Four months ago, the trust – which has managed the Kharang Rural Centre since Margaret's death – handed over a plot of land very close to the location of Margaret's original house (which also served as the orphanage). With impressive speed, foundations were prepared and Catie Scudera, a young volunteer from a UU congregation in Fairfax, Virginia (a graduate with experience in managing another development project in India, close to New Delhi), moved into the village to supervise the build.

I met Catie briefly during a visit to New York in January. She was staying with friends on a Christmas break and I was visiting my own family in Queens. We managed a coffee together in a quite depressing Starbucks in Union Square. It was a wet, miserable winter's day with sleet and rain outside. The building was equally drab on the inside. However, the enthusiasm and charisma of this clearly energetic young person – who was so obviously loving her work in the Khasi Hills of India – was like a beam of sunshine. I was certainly cheered by that brief encounter and by the opportunity to wish Catie well with the project and send good wishes to tribal friends.

Now Catie Scudera is back in India and the new Children's village has reached completion. Catie has recently been busy organising training for the staff, who will be responsible for the smooth running of the place. Two future 'mothers' have attended a course in New Delhi in preparation for their roles. Catie has met children who are candidates for future residency. Final plastering of the buildings is completed and, as I write, the Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village is in the process of opening.

I received an e-mail from Khlur Mukhim who is an ex-pupil of Margaret Barr and a dedicated and hard working Unitarian, with 'quality of village life' close to his heart.

Khlur wrote:



Catie Scudera (centre) with construction workers to her right and behind. On Catie's left are three local Unitarians who are closely involved with the Children's Village. Photo submitted by John Hewerdine

"I have just returned from my village Kharang for the great inauguration of our Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village! I want you to visualize our celebration through my camera lens. Let me briefly outline the inaugural function as follows: The Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village was inaugurated about noon today by the local legislator in the presence of the officials of the Kharang Rural Center, the Unitarian Union & the government Social Welfare Board, besides local church leaders, teachers, construction workers, friends and well-wishers. It was such a sunny and beautiful day when the inspiring spirit of Margaret Barr filled the air and gave us all reason to smile. Mr R.Pyngrope, local legislator, narrated his wonderful interactions with Unitarians and invited the AMBCV management to meet him for any possible government assistance required. Mr G.Mylliemngap, Kharang Rural Centre representative suggested that Kong Barr should be smiling to see her new orphanage inaugurated. Catie Scudera read the message sent by Dee Idnani and also gave her own message on the occasion. She also announced the names of the sponsors for all the 14 children.

Rev N. Suting, Secretary of the Children's village, expressed his happiness that Margaret Barr's dream had finally come true with the help received from hundreds of friends, churches and schools. Mrs Elizabeth Mawkhlieng, Director of SOS Children's Village, Shillong, gave very practical ideas, particularly to the mothers and caretakers, who are to listen to the children and treat them well. Elizabeth was instrumental in providing necessary training to the two mothers.

The inaugural session was chaired by Rev C.Lyngdoh, Chairman of the Children's Village, who also cut the inaugural cake. Others who spoke on the occasion included Mrs O.B.Tariang (Chair of the State Social Welfare Board), Mr T.K.Sahnoh, Secretary of the Kharang Village, the local Block Development Officer, Rev Mrs D.Khriam, Unitarian Union of North East India Treasurer, and Mr K.Rani, Unitarian Union Vice President who offered a prayer.

The Children gave a welcome song while the Mawsyn-
(Continued on next page)

Kingswood hosts Duke of Gloucester

By Marina Caddick

Kingswood Meeting House, near Birmingham, had a short while to organise the visit of HRH Prince Richard of Gloucester, to culminate their tercentenary celebrations. The Rev Anthony Howe worked ceaselessly with police, local dignitaries and royal aides to make the visit a success.

On his arrival at the chapel, the Duke was met by Anthony, Joyce Ashworth (President of the General Assembly), former minister the Rev Keith Hill, Bob Edwards (Chapel Chairman) and Philip White (Chair of Trustees).

He also took time to meet the KSOR – our band of volunteers who keep the chapel grounds and graveyard looking so beautiful.

The Duke progressed into the chapel seeing a 'History of the Chapel' display that is in progress; the choir led by the organist Peter Flower. The newly formed Women's League was represented as was the local Women's Institute together with the Brownies, Rainbows, Guides and Boys Brigade.

Whilst inside the Chapel, the Duke asked a number of questions about Unitarianism, and about our form of worship. He was particularly interested in the musical life of our Chapel



The Rev Ant Howe greeted HRH Prince Richard of Gloucester who visited the Kingswood Meeting House to celebrate the congregation's tercentenary. Photo at left: The duke unveiled a plaque which honours Kingswood ministers



and he asked a number of questions about the hymns we sing.

In the school room he mingled amongst and talked to members of the congregation who were enjoying tea and cake – he even had a slice of cake himself! After a brief walk in the grounds he returned to unveil a plaque which commemorated the past ministers – and the present one – who have served the chapel so well over the years.

He left to the sound of the choir singing 'Finlandia'.

One quote was that 'Kingswood is a small chapel but with a big heart'. This is so true as most of the congregation will agree.

Marina Caddick is a member of the Kingswood congregation.

Orphanage opens amidst joy, promise

(Continued from previous page)

Jri Sunday School children presented a special song. Khlur Mukhim gave the vote of thanks on behalf of the Children's Village management. A special mention was made several times today about the late Sue Lennox who was a major donor for this project. As you can read in one of the pictures, the central hall has been named the LENNOX ROOM. Most speakers mentioned the names of Dee Idnani and Catie Scudera (American Unitarian Universalists connected with the Fairfax Church) as major players/founders. A big feast followed the inauguration. It was really a grand celebration and a happy day especially for all the incoming residents and management of the orphanage."

The building project was foundering in its final stages. This was due to rising costs and some unforeseen difficulties. With the extremely high rainfall in the Khasi Hills, an access road had proved unable to cope with the construction traffic and was being washed away. It needed to be rebuilt. Also the recession, which has affected us all, increased costs of materials to the point that they were short of funds for completion of septic tanks and associated drainage. Also fittings and some

children's furniture were needed. I am happy to say that our General Assembly was able to help out by sending funds for these purposes. We have a number of individuals to thank for this but it was largely due to contributions by the Women's League that made this possible.

The new orphanage at Kharang will now be going through a stage of stabilization and we will be monitoring this carefully. The fact is that it will take funds to keep Margaret's dream alive and any contributions will be channelled directly to where they are needed. Please keep this new initiative in your minds when your congregation or Unitarian Group is reviewing the charities to which it gives support. The Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village is certainly a worthy contender.

Donations should be sent to Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY or to John Hewerdine, Whittle Wharf, 3, Dark Lane, Whittle Springs, PR6 8AE. Cheques should be made out to the General Assembly of U & F C Churches and marked on the back: 'Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village'.

John Hewerdine is a member at Chorley.

Executive greets newly elected members

By Neville Kenyon

The Executive Committee of the General Assembly met in Birmingham on 12 and 13 March.

Final arrangements were made for the Annual Meetings in Chester from 15th April. Day visitors for the Growth and Renewal Day on Friday 17th April will not have to pay any registration fee. This will be a particularly popular session including a report from the future ministry panel and an address by our guest speaker Jane Dwinell, from the Unitarian Universalists in the USA. Those wishing to attend what promises to be a scintillating day should contact Andrew Mason at Essex Hall on 0207 240 2384 - email: AMason@unitarian.org.uk.

The theme of the Meetings will be "Valuing and Supporting our Ministers". Two successful days were held in 2008 for ministers on the active roll, which gave them the opportunity to discuss ideas and concerns with members of the Executive Committee. This did not include those ministers listed as having retired, yet many on the 'retired' list continue to give most valuable and appreciated service to the movement.

As a mark of this appreciation, and in order to consult retired ministers about future steps, the EC is hosting a reception for retired ministers at the annual meetings. This will take place after lunch on Thursday 16 April, and a personal invitation is being sent to retired

ministers.

The current Executive was pleased to welcome the four newly-elected members who joined the meeting for the final session. They will be formally recognised at the Chester Meetings and each expressed enthusiasm for and commitment to the future governance of our movement.

Another key message from the Executive Committee was the extension of the Future Ministry (fm) project until June 2009 when the panel will report to the Executive Committee.

This was the final full meeting of the first elected GA Executive Committee established under the new governance protocol agreed at the Chester Meetings three years ago. The members have worked extremely well as a cohesive group and have successfully facilitated all the commissions and panels to produce effective work on behalf of Unitarians throughout the country. There will be ample opportunity for delegates at Chester to comment on the progress made during the three years and to submit ideas to help the newly elected Executive Committee extend the sound basis that has now been established.

Neville Kenyon is a member of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.

GA weekend set

By Neville Kenyon and Louise Rogers

This year the General Assembly weekend will be celebrated on 27th - 28th June. The dates have been brought forward from earlier years by popular demand. It is considered preferable to enjoy the celebrations during the summer months so that congregations may have the facility to organise outdoor activities.

The theme of the weekend is "Telling Our Stories" which may be about the history of your congregation, of your building, of your own spiritual history or similar ideas. We are encouraging people to focus on this in as creative and imaginative way as possible - for example it could be through writing, photography or a collaborative piece of art. A social network which can be found at <http://unitarios.ning.com/> is there for people to share ideas and develop shared approaches. The weekend will coincide with the launch of the Community Appeal 2009 and it is hoped that congregations will hold a fund raising event on the Saturday and observe the traditional GA Sunday the day after.

Posters featuring the weekend will be distributed in good time and it is hoped that even more groups will take the opportunity to lend their support to the General Assembly. As with all live giving, proceeds from the weekend that are sent to Essex Hall, the Unitarian Headquarters, will be matched by the Bowland Trust. For information, contact: Neville Kenyon na.kenyon@btinternet.com

Quiz now available

The 2009 Big Quiz has now been set - help to raise money for the GA; for your congregation, fellowship or Society; exercise those 'little grey cells' and have fun! There are two ways of getting copies of the quiz.

First, and preferred method - please e-mail Louise Rogers at louise@staffordshire-unitarians.net and ask for either the English or the Welsh quiz. You will be sent the electronic version - we then request that you pay 45p per quiz sold (we are suggesting that you sell each quiz for £1 thus making a profit for you of about 50p per quiz after the cost of printing). The second way to get copies of the quiz is to send a request to Louise for bundles of 10 at a cost of £5 per bundle. Please send any money either by cheque or directly transferred to the bank account of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Meeting House - details below. Please ensure that you send this money to arrive by 31 May the closing date of the quiz. Prizes will be awarded to the first three correct entries selected randomly from those received.

Contact details: Louise Rogers, 113 Park Terrace, Leycett, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 6AE Phone: 01782 750888

Bank details: Unitarian Meeting House Newcastle Staffs, Sort Code: 20-59-23, Account number: 20931241. Please reference your payment with the name of your congregation, fellowship, society etc. Copies will also be available at the Annual Meetings in Chester.

First, there was a naked man in church

Sometimes, the life of a church treasurer is anything but boring, as **Iain Brown** found in Glasgow when he became investigator and enforcer

A month or two earlier we had found a naked man one Sunday morning trapped between the inner and outer doors of the church. Our friends, the Quakers, who opened up that morning, found his smart city suit for him, gave him a cup of tea and some biscuits and sent him on his way before I arrived.

Later I found that the singing teacher who rented a studio from us had held a party the night before for his 'sponsors'.

Weeks later, I chanced to order something from a mail order firm only to find that they refused to do business with me until I paid off a considerable sum. I found out I was supposed to have bought bookcases, large amounts of paper and several pieces of office equipment and had them delivered to the church. On further enquiry I discovered the member of the congregation who acted unpaid as part of a kind of church officer was equally in debt. His surprise matched mine. The only other person who dealt with this firm was the singer and he too was in debt.

Then I noticed the bank statements for the church had never arrived for two or three months. The bank protested they had been sent and, on collecting them, I proved that the singer owed the church £1200 which was quite a lot in 1999.

The mail delivery firm absolved me from my 'debt' but refused to do anything further. I went to the police about a possible charge of interference with the mail but they refused even to investigate. However they did say that we were entitled to impound the singer's goods for non payment of rent, so I had the locks changed on his studio door and gave him notice to pay up or leave.

After church the next Sunday, two students turned up with sad tales of large payments made to this man on promises of career opportunities in London which never materialised. The party for sponsors which had spawned the naked man had allegedly been to accumulate funds to sponsor the young African student who was hoping to be sent to London to further her singing career. The dates for signing in to tutoring were now past and the singer was clearly avoiding her.

The breakthrough came when a young musician contacted me because she could not get into the studio where she had stored her instruments and she was giving classes to Mencap that week. She had been duped into opening the singer's mail and taking his phone calls in exchange for a desk and a telephone line in our studio. Together we investigated drawers full of unpaid bills and, especially, a set of recordings worth about £800.00 and unpaid for, made by some musicians across the street. I took those musicians into the impounded studio to give them their CDs and as they came in they exclaimed "There's our piano!" So I had them take the beautiful Rolande piano away and leave me with a receipt. All in all, I became determined to avenge the frauds on the poor students and the 'secretary' and teach the singer that a church was not such a soft spot as he had apparently thought.

Meanwhile I tracked the singer down to his house, identi-

fied his car, located his parents and discovered his real name.

As the day for the final payment of rent approached I was told by the 'secretary' that the singer was planning to break in the day before and move all his possessions to offices nearby. I visited these offices and quietly verified that.

So on 'the day' I sat in my car outside the church and waited with my camera for the singer to arrive with his removal van. My tall American ally appeared at the door of the church building and looked anxiously up and down so I got out of the car to be told that the singer had hidden himself in the church before it closed, had broken down the door to the studio and, with the help of a woman, was busy packing up all his possessions.

I marched into the studio calling him by his real name and saying 'Do you mind if I take a few photographs' and instantly took several photographs of him and his woman and the packing process. He suddenly pushed my ally out of the door and attacked me, wrestling with me to grab the camera, tearing several buttons off my shirt – but without any other success.

I went out to the door of the church and called the police, saying I had been assaulted. This time they arrived within minutes – two of them, a small Scottish one and a larger Irish one. I told my story and ended by saying that the singer would tell them a different one. The smaller one drew himself up and said "We're the police. We don't believe anybody." And they went in, leaving us at the door.

When they returned they said that they had sent someone round to verify the address I had given them for the singer but that he was very unhappy and was accusing me of stealing his piano. I produced the receipt and they went off again. When they returned they announced "He's very happy now."

I was asked if I wanted to charge him with assault. I hesitated and the police reminded me that I had given him some provocation. So I passed up the chance, saying that all I wanted was the church's money back.

The police released the woman and told the teacher he was to be at the church at a certain date and time and they would be there to ensure I got my money for the church. If not, his feet would not touch the ground before he was in jail.

As commanded, he turned up with half the money on the day and pled that he would have to sell his car to pay the other half. He was ever so fawningly Uriah Heep-like sorry. Would I accept it if he promised he would make it up later? I had been 'done' that way before. A week later he turned up once more before the police at the church door and paid the full sum.

Then I posted up his photograph and that of his woman inside the church with a warning to all that, if seen, the local police should be informed immediately.

Weeks later I was in the local police station about another matter and had to identify myself. There were hoots of laughter and I was told that the Irish policeman was a good Catholic but he had been saying that he would join our church.

Iain Brown is a member of Glasgow Unitarians.



Glasgow Church Centre

Letters to the Editor

What Obama said applies to Unitarians

To the Editor:

I was struck by Barack Obama's acceptance speech. It seemed to me that much of what he said about the American nation could be said about the Unitarian and Free Christian Church. I have adapted his speech below for the interest of your readers. It would be interesting to hear their responses.

We are mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors

The Unitarian and Free Christian Church has carried on because we, the people, have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers, and true to our founding principles. So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Unitarians.

Less measurable, but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our Church – a nagging fear that the church's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights. On this day, let us choose hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, let us proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our organisation. We remain a young church, but in the words of St Paul, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to seek meaning for themselves.

Our church's journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted, for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things – some celebrated, but more often ordinary folk following their own consciences, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards freedom. Many had to pack up their few worldly possessions and leave their homes, made fugitives by the nation's laws and some even had to travel across oceans

in search of a new life. They saw their faith as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. Our religion is no less needed than it was 50 years ago or 100 years ago or in the 1700s. But our time of standing still, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions – that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking our churches and chapels, our committees and our structures, but most of all our offering of a spiritual home for religious seekers.

Now, there are some who question our ability to invest in the future – who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this church has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them – that the stale arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our church is too liberal or conservative, but whether it works. Let us reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Those ideals still light the world; let us not give them up for expedience's sake. We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort – even greater cooperation and understanding between us.

We will not apologise for our church, nor will we waver in its defence. For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a church of Christians and Jews, feminists, earth-centred spirits and humanists. Let us believe that the old arguments shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that we will play our role in ushering in a new era of peace. We are a church whose principle is tolerance, a restless seeking after the truth; an unwillingness to settle for norms which

are not true for us. We must be willing to embrace change, new ways of doing things. For we cannot afford to fail, we cannot let down those souls who seek us as their spiritual home; those souls who have already found their spiritual home and those who fought in the past for our freedom to worship according to our conscience. We have a duty to keep providing that community where you are welcomed, where your thoughts and doubts are acceptable and where you yourself are affirmed.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends – honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and reason – these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths.

What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition, on the part of every Unitarian, that we have duties to ourselves, our church, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

Adapted from The acceptance speech of Barack Hussein Obama on his Inauguration as the 44th President of the USA.

Nicky Jenkins

Unitarians historically embrace science

To the Editor:

I recently watched Prof Colin Blakemore's programme in the Channel 4 series on the History of Christianity. He dealt with the relationship between the religion and science. It went over well-trodden ground but his conversation with David Paterson, an Anglican priest who confessed to not believing in the virgin birth amongst other points, was fascinating. It motivated me to write the following e-mail to Blakemore.

Dear Prof Blakemore

I watched your interview in the series

(Continued on next page)

Humble man is Transylvanian bishop

By Joyce Ashworth

The spring sun shone warmly on those gathering in Kolozsvar for the installation ceremony of the 31st Bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church, and I felt both privileged and honoured to be representing British Unitarians on such an important occasion. I was delighted to be one of 16 people officially designated to bring greetings following the service of worship and installation. These included the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, archbishop, bishops and deputy bishops of other eastern European faith communities, secretaries of state for education, culture and religion in Hungary and Romania and the deputy mayor of the city of Kolozsvar.

A warm, humble and earnest man, Bishop Ferenc based his address on Mark 10: 35-45, the request of James and John. He posed the questions: "How should the church be defined? What should its role and tasks be in our world, and the society in which we are living?" In closing, he concluded that the church is the spiritual community of believers working to



Installation blessing on Bishop Ferenc by Maria Pap, Dean and past Sharpe Scholar. Photo by Joyce Ashworth

build the Kingdom of God according to the teachings of Jesus: a community of love to prove the presence of God; an aim, but also a task to fulfil.

The ceremony was followed by a very grand festive lunch attended by 400 clergy and guests. There was ample time to mix and mingle between courses and it was wonderful to be greeted warmly by past Sharpe Scholars who studied at Unitarian College during my time there as administrator.

My two-day visit was well worth the time spent travelling. I was fortunate to be allowed a short, informal chat with the bishop-elect in the morning before his installation and managed a free afternoon to wander and enjoy the grandeur of the aristocratic architecture of the old city, before attending a formal dinner with the retiring bishop and his wife, the bishop-elect, the college committee and other international guests.

Joyce Ashworth is president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Congregations.



Image from the programme for the installation of Bishop Ferenc. Provided by Joyce Ashworth

Letter

(Continued from previous page)

on the 'History of Christianity' and found it to be a well-balanced presentation of the relationship between that religion and science. Much of the information and discussion was familiar to me as I have read quite widely on the subject. However, some of the images you used gave a most illuminating and graphic illustration of the very non-Christian approach of the church in times past. Those who saw fit to harass and punish 'heretics' had forgotten that Jesus himself was considered as such within his own times and religious tradition. Many a new religion starts as a heresy!

Towards the end of your programme you talked to the Rev David Paterson of the 'Sea of Faith' presenting his views as having emerged as a result of modern science. However, such ideas have been around since the early days of the religion, being declared heretical by the Council of Nicaea. Many were re-visited by the Dissenters of the 18th century, probably best represented by Joseph Priestley F.R.S. He applied the analytical methods and reason of his 'natural philosophy' to religious matters. He provided evidence against the virgin birth and divinity of Jesus and the existence of a soul. His ideas developed into the Unitarian

denomination. In modern times, the denomination has become less closely identified with its original Christian tradition. There is no creedal test, and views in any one congregation can vary widely including a strongly Humanist stance. It rejects dogma in favour of an enquiring approach to help members understand the human condition. One of its training centres for new ministers is in your own University – Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Road where there is also a Chapel community.

Needless to say, such an approach has never found it difficult to accept the findings of Science. Darwin caused little problem for our predecessors and is currently being celebrated for his free thinking, coming as he did from a partly Unitarian background; his maternal grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, was one of Priestley's associates in the Lunar Society. From what you said of your own position, I think you would find both our contemplation and sense of community acceptable. Oh, and our hymns would be to your liking as well, many being God-free!

Alan Pennington B.Sc., M.Litt.

York Unitarians

News in brief

Children learn of Darwin's legacy



To mark the end of their celebrations of Darwin a group of children and adults from Wakefield, Bradford and Fulwood (Sheffield) congregations got together for an afternoon at the exhibition of prehistoric life in Doncaster. Learning, fellowship and fun! Photo by Mel Prideaux

Ipswich Silver inspected at Eastern Union Meeting



The Silver communion plate was examined by members of the Easter Union, the regional Unitarian District, at a recent meeting at Christchurch Mansion in Ipswich. The 4 silver communion mugs date from the 17th and 18th century and were used in the Lord's Supper celebrations at the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House.

They are distinguished by 2 handles and were not considered sacred or special as the dissenters' services did not involve the 'body and blood' of Jesus, but rather a commemoration of the event. The plate was featured on the Antiques Road Show when a value on one of the cups was put at £50,000.

In the photo above Rosemary Hegerty of Bury St Edmunds, Shirley Fieldhouse of Cambridge and Linda King of Ipswich examine the cups in detail as Rev Cliff Reed of Ipswich looks on. Cliff Reed gave a talk about the history of the silver and the many connections with members of the Ipswich congregation. Photo by Martin Gienke



£600 presentation to rainbow family trust

On Sunday, 8 March, a cheque for £600 (the original target was £200), raised to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of Stand Chapel Sunday School, was presented to Kate Puc, representing the Rainbow Family Trust, from Francis House Children's Hospice, Manchester. (from l to r) Barbara Whitfield, Sunday School president, Ruby Hooper, Kate Puc. Photo submitted by Bill Hargreaves

Summer School bookings open

Booking are quickly rolling in for Summer School 2009 – so book soon if you want to be assured of a place! The theme this year is 'The Journey' and the choice of groups demonstrates the depth and diversity of our movement, with everything from writing skills to walking as spiritual practice being used as ways to explore the theme.

Hucklow Summer School is a vibrant part of the denominational Religious Education programme and provides space for personal and leadership development in an intentional and supportive community. As well as a structured programme during the morning, there are also several optional afternoon and evening activities offered every year.

The excellent children's programme and the warm and supportive community help to make it an excellent week for families as well as individuals. With new and innovative forms of worship and high standards of engagement group and other small group work Summer School always leaves people wanting more.

Over the years Summer School has played a significant roll in bringing people into a more engaged relationship with Unitarianism, and has been for many people a hugely important part of the Unitarian journey.

Congregations and Districts have often sponsored key individuals to attend and bring home good practice. If you want to know more contact Mel Prideaux on 01924 781020 or melpx@hotmail.com, or visit our website at <http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk>